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NO. 2

VANITY™

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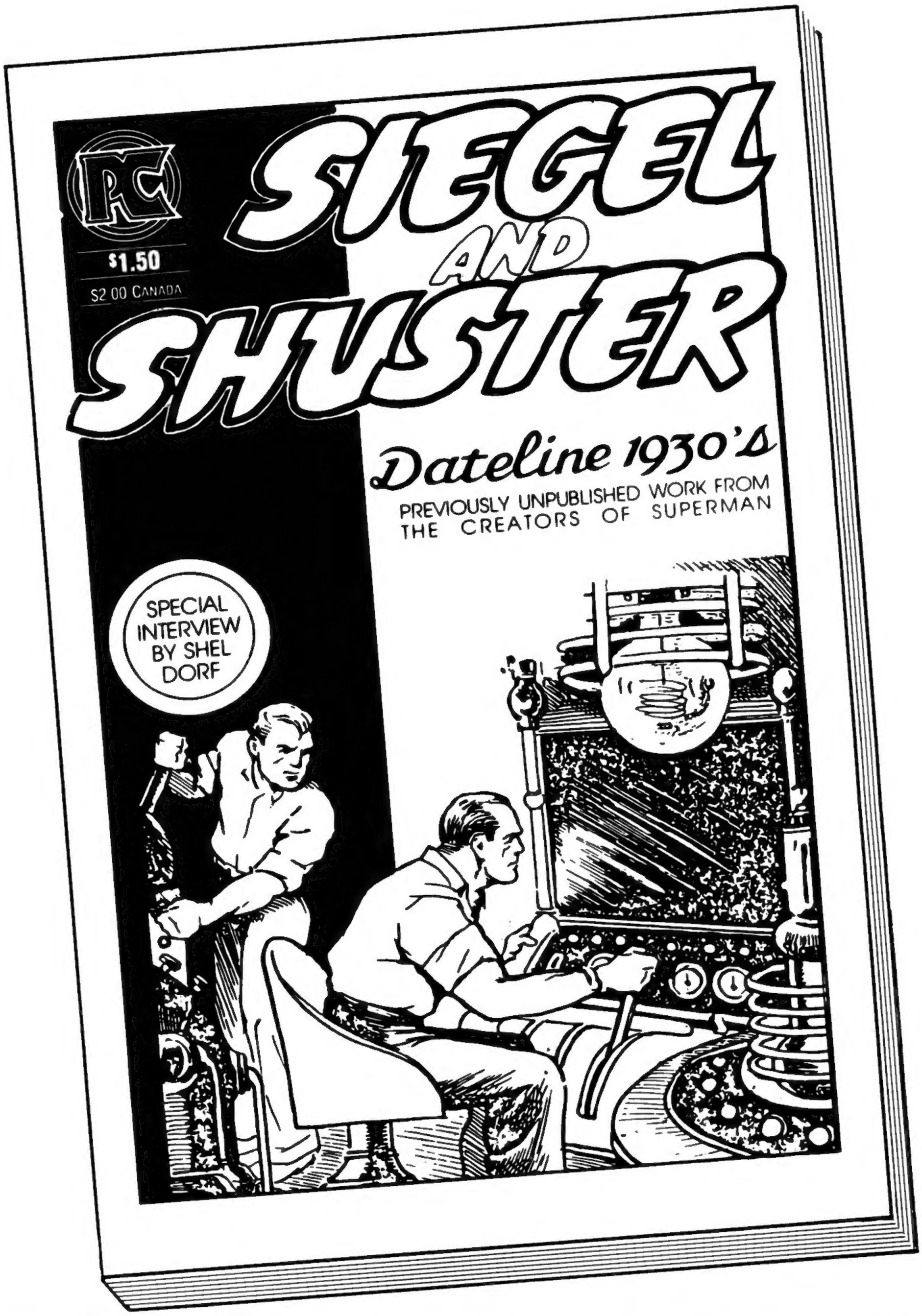
BACK-UP FEATURE

Avalone™

ON SALE NOW!



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WHAT? YOU DON'T REMEMBER WHAT HAPPENED LAST ISSUE?

NEVER LET IT BE SAID THAT *VANITY* WASN'T *FAIR*... *THIS* TIME WE'LL GIVE YOU A QUICK RECAP!

"LAST ISSUE, AN *ALIEN STARSHIP* CRASHED ON THE MOON, UNCOVERING AN *ANCIENT DEVICE*...

CAPTAIN! OUR LANDING HAS TRIGGERED A RADIO BEACON!

IT MUST BE PART OF OF THAT PLANET'S DEFENSE SYSTEM...

THEY'LL SEND UP TROOPS FOR SURE!

PREPARE FOR COMBAT!

"WHILE ON EARTH...

I'M TELLING YOU THE SAME THING I TOLD THE *RUSSIANS*...

I'M GOING TO THE MOON TO GET THAT TRANSMITTER FOR *MYSELF*!

"BUT VANITY'S SHIP, THE *FALLEN STAR*, WAS DAMAGED IN A JET ATTACK...

HOW DID IT HAPPEN, PROF?

DER FORCE FIELD UND INVISIBILITY SCREENS SHORTED OUT!

"THANKS TO VANITY'S CAVE-MAN CONSORT...

MA'NAN! HOW COULD YOU PUT A PENNY IN THE *MAIN FUSE* BOX!

MY TOY DINO-SAURS!

SMEK

thank you for using matter transmuter data bay Five...

"THE FALLEN STAR DROPPED BEHIND IN A RACE TO THE MOON...

SIGH!

WHY ARE YOU SO WORRIED ABOUT BEATING DER AMERICANS UND RUSSIANS?

PROF, YOU KNOW HOW I'VE ALWAYS TOLD YOU I BUILT THE FALLEN STAR?

WELL, I LIED!

STORY & ART: WILL MEUGNIOT

Letters: D.W. MacOda Colors: Jo Meugniot

A SCENT OF LILAC

YOU VERE SAYING IT STARTED BACK IN DER STONE AGE...

YES... *MA'NAN* HAD BEEN PRESSURED BY *BA'TOOTY* AND THE REST OF THE TRIBE INTO *EXPELLING* ME...

"THE HARD WAY!

AAAAIEE!

WM/84

"I KNEW I WAS GOING TO DIE.

"BUT I GREW LESS AFRAID AS I FELL.

"ALL THE TRIBE HATED ME, EXCEPT *MA'NAN*...

"AND NOW *HE'D* BETRAYED ME!

"MY SOUL DIED AS I FELL, MY BODY ACHED TO JOIN IT.

DEATH, I AM YOURS!

"BUT *HE* DIDN'T HEAR MY CALL...

"MY FALL WAS BROKEN BY A...

OOOF!

A LILAC BUSH!

A LILAC BUSH!

MA'NAN KNEW THE TRIBE WOULD HAVE KILLED ME...

SO HE PUSHED ME OVER THE CLIFF AND INTO A LILAC BUSH TO SAVE ME!

or did he?

I STILL DON'T KNOW. I GUESS I *NEVER* WILL.

"FOR THE NEXT FEW WEEKS I STRUGGLED TO SURVIVE...

"AVOIDING THE TRIBE...

"CATCHING FOOD...

"AND AVOIDING BEING FOOD!

"THEN, ONE NIGHT... *I SAW IT!*

A PIECE OF *SKY* FALLING!

it's coming towards me!

"I WAS THROWN TO THE EARTH BY THE IMPACT AND KNOCKED OUT!

AAAAIIIE!

KBOOM!

"WHEN I CAME TO, I SAW THE *FALLEN STAR* FOR THE FIRST TIME...

IT'S SO BIG!

"I KNEW THEN. IT HAD TO BE *MINE*.

help me...

"IT WAS THE *GOLDEN MAN*, PILOT OF THE FALLEN STAR!

HELP ME... SO I MAY TEACH YOU HOW TO USE THIS SHIP TO RAISE YOUR KIND UP FROM THEIR CAVES AND INTO THE VERY STARS!

"I KNEW HE DID NOT LIE ABOUT THE SHIP'S POWER.

H-HOW CAN I HELP Y-YOU...

"EVEN AS I HELPED THE GOLDEN MAN, I PLOTTED REVENGE AGAINST MA'NAN, BA'TOOTY AND THE OTHERS!

SEE HOW THE SHIP REPAIRS ITSELF?

YES. THE FALLEN STAR CAN DO *ANYTHING!*

ALMOST ANYTHING! THE SHIP'S MASTER PROGRAM PROHIBITS THE MATTER TRANSMUTER FROM BEING USED TO MAKE *WEAPONS!*

BUT I *COULD* USE ITS POWER TO MAKE EVERYONE HERE LOOK LIKE ME?

YES...

BUT I DON'T KNOW WHY YOU'D WANT TO. THE OTHERS ARE MUCH BETTER SUITED TO SURVIVE!

WHAT DO YOU *MEAN*?

COMPARE YOURSELF TO *THEM*! THEIR BRAINCASES ARE *LARGE* LIKE MINE! THEIR MUSCLES AND BONES ARE *STRONGER*!

YOU ARE A *THROWBACK*!

"SOON AFTER, THAT... THE GOLDEN MAN DIED.

"BUT NOT BEFORE HE TOLD ME OF A *WARNING BEACON* HE'D HIDDEN ON THE MOON...

IF YOUR PEOPLE'S VIOLENCE ESCAPES INTO SPACE, MY ALARM WILL SUMMON AN ARMADA TO DESTROY THE EARTH!

I'LL FIND YOUR ALARM!

THE ONLY WAY TO FIND IT IS TO TRIGGER IT WITH A NUCLEAR WEAPON!

YOUR EVIL DEED WILL CATCH UP TO YOU...

AND YOUR *VANITY* WILL DOOM THIS WORLD!

SO! *DOTT'S* WHAT YOU'RE SO WORRIED ABOUT!

YOU THINK THAT THIS SIGNAL ISHT FROM THE GOLDEN MAN'S *BEACON*!

RIGHT! AND THAT MEANS SOMEONE NOT OF THIS EARTH IS ON THE MOON...

WITH A NUCLEAR DEVICE!

ON THE MOON, IN A CRIPPLED SPACESHIP A COUPLE OF STONE THROWS AWAY FROM THE GOLDEN MAN'S BEACON...

SIR!

OH, MIGHTY ANCESTORS, GRANT ME WISDOM!

DON'T CALL ME 'SIR'! IF IT WEREN'T FOR THE MALES, WE MASUGATTI WOULD NEVER HAVE NEEDED TO LEAVE HOME!

SORRY, CAPTAIN.

IT'S OK. I'M JUST TENSE. WHAT'S THE STATUS?

THERE'RE *THREE* INCOMING VESSELS. TWO OF THEM ARE RATHER PRIMITIVE, BUT THE THIRD, WHICH IS HANGING BACK, IS AN *OMEGA* CLASS SHIP!

WE ESTIMATE THEIR LANDING IN FIFTEEN HOURS!

damn

WE CAN'T RISK THE *HATCH*! WE MUST TRY TO DESTROY THOSE LANDING PARTIES!

WHILE ABOARD TWO OF THOSE INCOMING VESSELS...

IVAN IGNOSKY! YOU SON OF A SOVIET SPACE HOUND! I HAVEN'T SEEN YOU SINCE GENEVA!

BUZZ BUZZCOCK! IS YOU?

YOU GOT IT, COMRADE!

YOU NOTICE LARGE VEHICLE TO OUR REAR ALSO?

CHECK! I WAS HOPING THAT BOGIE WAS YOURS!

I'FE GOT IT!

IS NOT YOURS?

I KNOW HOW TO BEAT THOSE OTHER SHIPS TO DER MOON!

KLIK!

KLIK!

YOU REMEMBER DER SPACE ALGAE I FOUND IN THIS METEORITE?

NO, BUT GO ON...

VELL, DER SPACE ALGAE LOVES DER EXTRA-PLANETARY ENVIRONMENT SO MUCH THAT IT CHANGES DER *MICRODUST* UND *IONS* IT FINDS THERE INTO *OXYGEN*!

SO?

SO I'M GOING TO USE DER ALGAE TO MAKE A SOLAR SAIL!

OH, REALLY?

REALLY! FIRST WE'LL STRIP DER SHIP FOR MORE MASS TO FEED INTO DER MATTER TRANSMUTER...

GOOD! DER BOOMS ARE IN PLACE! NOW WE'LL START RUNNING AN ELECTRIC CHARGE BETWEEN DEM!

TELL DER MATTER TRANSMUTER TO START MAKING DER SPACE ALGAE, EDSEL!

GOTTA SPRAY THE ALGAE INTO THE ION FIELD BETWEEN THE BOOMS OR IT'LL GET SUCKED INTO SPACE!

DERE! LOOK AT IT!

IT'S BEAUTIFUL!

UND WE'RE ALREADY PICKING UP SPEED FROM DER SOLAR WIND BLOWING AGAINST DER OXYGEN SHEATH DER SPACE ALGAE IS MAKING.

PROF, YOU'RE A GENIUS!

BUT UFF COURSE!

IVAN! THAT BIG MOTHER BEHIND US...

DA! IS GAINING ON US

IT'S GONNA CATCH US IN THAT NETTING!

I'LL BE DOGGED!

LENIN'S GHOST! IT PASSED OVER US LIKE A SHADOW!

WE SHOULD BEAT THEM TO THE MOON WITH HOURS TO SPARE!

GOOD! I'VE PINPOINTED THE GOLDEN MAN'S TRANSMITTER AND THE *INTRUDERS*!

LET ME SEE THEM ON DER MAIN SCREEN! DIS IS SO EXCITING!

ENJOY THE VIEW WHILE YOU CAN, PROF.!

WE MAY HAVE TO BLAST THEM TO GET TO THE TRANSMITTER!

B-BUDT... YOU CAN'T!

I CAN!

NO, WE CAN'T!

YOU SAID TO CANNIBALIZE ALL NONESSENTIAL MATERIALS TO MAKE THE SOLAR SAIL...

...SO ME AN' EDSEL THOUGHT YOU MEANT ALL THE GUNS AN' STUFF TOO!

YOU MORON! YOU KNOW THE MATTER TRANSMUTER WON'T RECONSTRUCT WEAPONS!

SO, VE'RE FACING AN UNKNOWN FOE WITH NO FIRE POWER!

NOT QUITE! I'VE STILL GOT MY BLASTERS!

SZ-IP!

SZ-IP!

BUT DEY ONLY WORK ON INORGANIC MATERIAL!

I KNOW, BUT MAYBE WE CAN TAKE OUT THAT TRANSMITTER WITH THEM!

YOU WERE RIGHT, CAPTAIN! THE ENEMY IS USING THE RADIO BEACON TO GUIDE THEM DOWN!

HOW SOON WILL THEY LAND?

IN MINUTES!

SEND SQUADS TWO AND FOUR TO THE BEACON. THEY MUST TRY TO LEAD OUR FOES AWAY FROM THIS SHIP!

BUT WE HAVE NO *WEAPONS!*

I KNOW... BUT THIS SHIP IS A NURSERY, NOT A GUNBOAT!

AND THOSE EGGS SLOWLY WARMING IN THE HATCHERY ARE OUR RACE'S ONLY HOPE OF CONTINUANCE!

YOU FED THE *SPACESUITS* INTO THE MATTER TRANS-MUTER?

AW, VAN, I THOUGHT...

NEVER MIND WHAT YOU THOUGHT! HOW'RE WE GOING TO OPERATE ON THE *MOON* WITHOUT *SPACESUITS*?

ISHT NO PROBLEM!

DER WAY I DESIGNED DER SOLAR SAIL, IT WILL FOLD INTO A DOME OVER DER SHIP...

...UND DER SPACE ALGAE WILL FILL IT WITH AIR!

GLAD AM I COMRADE BUZZ THAT OUR GOVERNMENTS HAVE ORDERED US TO WORK TOGETHER AGAINST THIRD PARTY!

GOES DOUBLE FER ME, IVAN!

BUT THAT BIG BOGIE JUST SET DOWN, AN' I GOT A FEELIN' THE PARTY'S GONNA BE OVER BY THE TIME WE GET THERE!

WELL, THEY'VE CAUGHT US IN THEIR *DOME*, AND NOW THEY'RE TRYING TO *POISON* US WITH THAT *OXYGEN-NITROGEN ATMOSPHERE* THEY'RE PUMPING IN!

WHAT CAN I DO? THERE MUST BE SOME--

I'VE GOT IT

THE HATCHERY'S *HEATING MIRROR*! IF WE ANGLE IT RIGHT... IT CAN BECOME A *HEAT RAY*!

OUR BEST CHANCE TO SHUT DOWN THAT BEACON IS FOR A SMALL GROUP OF US TO STORM IT, WHILE THE REST OF YOU CREATE A DIVERSION!

HOW'RE WE GONNA DO THAT WITH NO GUNS?

WITH ROCKS! THANKS TO DER MOON'S LOWER GRAVITY YOU WILL BE able TO THROW DEM AN INCREDIBLE DISTANCE!

I HOPE THEY DON'T HAVE DEATH RAYS!

OH, DEAR! THIS WAITING IS AWFUL!

BONK!

OWTCH!

SOMEONE HIT ME WITH THIS ROCK!

LOOK!

CHARGE!

WE'VE GOT TO LEAD THEM AWAY FROM HERE!

GRAB SOME ROCKS AND RUN!

THEY'RE RETREATING! C'MON EDSEL! WE'VE GOT WORK TO DO!

I HOPE WE CAN REPROGRAM THAT BEACON!

WE'VE RUN FAR ENOUGH! TAKE A *STAND*!

THROW!

OW!

OW!

THAT HURTS!

DUCK AND REGROUP!

THEIR VOLLEY'S SLOWED UP! NOW'S THE TIME TO...

CHARGE!

I'M OUT OF ROCKS!

ME TOO!

RUN FOR IT!

NOW WE'VE GOT 'EM.!

HELP.!

CAPTAIN, DO YOU READ ME?

YES.! WE HAVE THE MIRROR IN POSITION.!

THREE TWO ONE

ZAP!

EEEYOW.!

SCAP!

ZAP!

PROF.! VAN.! HELP.!

ZAP!

I'M ON MY WAY, MA'NAN.!

YOU VOULDN'T KNOW WHY DER MATTER TRANS-MUTER STARTED MAKING SILLY-LOOKING DINOSAURS, VOULD YOU?

MEANWHILE, BACK AT THE BEACON...

THERE.! I'VE REPROGRAM-ED IT TO SAY ITS LAST TRANSMIS-SION WAS A MISTAKE.!

HA.! GOLDEN MAN, I'VE BEATEN YOU.!

MA'NAN, THIS IS VANITY, HOW'S THE BATTLE GOING?

WHAT BATTLE?

THE OTHER GUYS GAVE UP AS SOON AS PROF GOT HERE WITH THE DINOSAURS!

DINOSAURS? *WHAT* DINOSAURS?

YOU'D BETTER COME SEE...

THANK YOU FOR REPAIRING OUR SHIP, ***MASTER OF OUR*** GIANT ANCESTORS!

WE WERE GLAD TO HELP YOU UND DER EGGS ON YOUR WAY TO VENUS...

JUST DON'T FORGET THAT YOU ***OWE*** US ONE!

WE WON'T FORGET.' BUT WHAT WILL YOU DO WITH THE ***GIANT ANCESTORS***?

WE'LL LEAVE 'EM ON THE ***MOON***! PROF'S ALREADY STARTED ***TERRA-FORMING*** HERE UNDER THE DOME!

IT'S ***NEAT*** TO HAVE DINOSAURS AROUND AGAIN!

I CAN'T WAIT TO SEE THOSE ASTRONAUTS' FACES WHEN THEY GET HERE AND FIND ***DINOSAURS ON THE MOON***!

Avalone™

CREATED BY DAVID ROSS

EPISODE ONE: SURVIVAL

HERE IN 2360, THE DREADED HOLOCAUST IS A DIM AND FADING MEMORY FOR MANKIND--BUT NOT FOR ORACLE.

MANY METERS BENEATH GREYSTONE, COLORADO, ORACLE WAS CONSTRUCTED TO PREDICT MAN'S SOCIOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT.

<SPACECRAFT "PATHFINDER" APPROACHING. IN 2154 EXPEDITION IT COMMENCED. POWER LEVELS FLUCTUATING.>

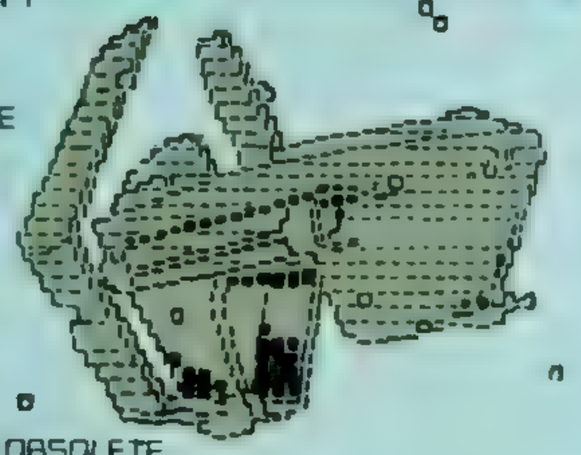
PATHFINDER

THE STRIDE

<SPACE PLATFORM "RAMA" PATHFINDER NEARING. DEFENSE SPHERE SHOULD ENGAGE.>

BUT NOW, AMID A CHANGING WORLD, ORACLE COORDINATES THE NEW COLONIES TO KEEP EARTH'S CIVILIZATIONS ALIVE...

STAR CRAFT
scanning
identified
THE STRIDE



FUNCTION OBSOLETE
PART PROJECT AFTERMATH
RAMA TO INITIATE TERMINATION
20-19-18-17-16-15-14-13-12 •

PACIFIC COMICS PROUDLY PRESENTS A LIMITED SERIES OF PEOPLE AND PASSION BY:

DAVID CAMPITI	DAVID ROSS	DAN ADKINS
words	*pictures/colors*	*inks*
CODY	MAY/JUAIRE	DAVID SCROGGY
letters	*consultants*	*edits*

TWO CENTURIES AGO, PATHFINDER LAUNCHED INTO MULTI-SPACE AS THE FIRST DEEP SPACE PROBE. ALSO THE LAST. NOW, ITS CREW RETURNS FIVE YEARS OLDER, A LITTLE WISER, ITS MISSION UNFULFILLED...

SANDRA--WE SHOULD SEE A CHAIN OF SEVEN PLATFORMS, BUT I CAN SPOT ONLY ONE...!

MAYBE NASA MISSED A PAYMENT AND THEY WERE REPOSSESSED.

"ONE PIT STOP AND THIS LITTLE VACATION IS OVER, DAN."

"SOME VACATION! WE FOUND ONE STRANGE SPHERE OUTSIDE PLUTO--"

--THAT'S IT! NO ALIEN CONTACT. NO HABITABLE WORLDS.

WARNING... PROPER IDENTIFICATION REQUIRED... UNAUTHORIZED CRAFT MUST RECEIVE CLEARANCE OR DEFENSE SPHERE WILL BE ENGAGED...

LOCK IN THE ENABLE CODE BEFORE ITS LASER DEFENSES--

DAN, I HOPE A LATER LAUNCH HAD MORE LUCK WH--

ENABLE CODE COMMENCING: "OPEN THE POD BAY DOORS, HAL."

WAIT-- SOMETHING'S WRONG!

RAMA'S GOING THROUGH THE MOTIONS, BUT IT'S *POWER LEVELS* AREN'T HIGH ENOUGH TO *FIRE*, DANIEL.

THAT MEANS SOMEONE FAILED TO DELIVER A *PRIMARY CODE* SO THE STATION COULD FUNCTION AT CAPACITY.

THAT'S A *POSSIBILITY*.

FINE. *LAND* IT, SANDRA.

SANDRA PETERS, YOU MAY ONLY BE "*CAPTAIN*" WHILE OUR FEARLESS LEADER'S SNOOZING, BUT *I'LL* FOLLOW YOU ANYWHERE.

GLAD TO *HEAR* THAT, DAN--BECAUSE I THINK I LEFT THE WATER RUNNING WHEN WE *LEFT*.!

HA HA HA HA HA HA

THEIR LAUGHTER COMES AT THE OLD JOKE, THOUGH HOARY FROM MANY YEARS OF CLOSE CONTACT, FOR ANY RELEASE IS WELCOME.

ENTERING RAMA, THEY FORCE THEMSELVES NOT TO SPEAK IN "SHORTHAND," PREPARING FOR CIVILIZATION ONCE AGAIN. THERE ARE NO SURPRISES FOR THEM. SAVE ONE.

CAPTAIN THOMPSON! STILL NO TRANSMISSIONS FROM *DIRTSIDE*.

MOST EVERYTHING'S *OPERATIONAL*, HERE, THOUGH.

FIX WHATEVER' *IS* DOWN. *JURY-RIG* IT IF YOU HAVE TO, YEATES.

PETERS, IS THE *POWER* ENABLE CODE--

READY. RAMA: "*MAY THE FORCE BE WITH US.*"

AHH, *SUCCESS!*

RAMA'S *PROGRAMMER* MUST'VE BEEN A CLASSIC MOVIE FREAK.

HERE, I'LL PUNCH UP SOME *SCANS* FROM *DIRTSIDE*.

HOLD -- WHAT'S THAT?

WHERE'S THE PEOPLE?

MY GOD.!!

THAT SHOULD BE A SURFACE VISUAL OF NASA. INCREASE MAGNIFICATION.

DANIEL BERENSON FEELS HIS BLOOD RUN COLD. WITH RAMA INOPERATIVE, WAR MAY WELL HAVE OCCURED BELOW.

LAYING WASTE TO A WORLD BERENSON HAS REMEMBERED FOR TWO CENTURIES AS HOME.

NEW YORK CITY. SAN FRANCISCO. PARIS. EACH CITY'S SCAN IS CAREFULLY MADE. FEAR FADES... TERROR GROWS.

OUR HOME TOWNS -- KEY CITIES... GONE.!!

THEY... COULDN'T HAVE--!

SEE IF YOU CAN PUNCH UP AVALONE. THAT CITY WAS HALF-BUILT WHEN WE LEFT.

THE... "SELF-SUFFICIENCY" EXPERIMENT? COORDINATES ARE...

ALREADY GOT IT. SEE?

RETRIEVE ALL FILE DATA. NEW, OLD, I DON'T CARE!

WHILE, ON EARTH, IN A PROUD AIRSHIP CALLED THE STRIDE...

MAGGIE, THINK OF IT THIS WAY... SOME OF MY BEST FRIENDS ARE "BUGS."

TROILUS, YOU MAY BE COMMANDER OF THIS SURVEY SHIP, BUT--

DON'T ROLL YOUR EYES, IT'S TRUE. I GREW UP WITH THEM SIX YEARS, BEFORE I WAS BROUGHT IN TO AVALONE.

THEY'RE NOT THAT BAD. AND THEY'RE NOT "THINGS."

SO GET USED TO THEM. THIS ONE DIDN'T ASK TO BECOME RADIOACTIVE!

FRUK!

WHA--??

TRY EXPLAINING THAT TO--

SORRY, TROILUS. THE RADIATION-- IT'S AFFECTED ITS BRAIN!

OHHHH...

THIS MUCH EXPOSURE'S INCREDIBLE!

TAKE CARE WITH IT! IF WE COULD LOCATE THE SOURCE, WE MIGHT DISCOVER--

KROOM

WATCH OUT.! LOSING PRESSURE--!

BRIDGE.! DROP ALTITUDE FAST... WE'VE GOT A BREACH IN THE HULL.!!

BUT WE'VE A BIGGER PROBLEM-- A RUNAWAY HEALTH HAZARD.!

CAPTAIN THOMPSON--THIS PLATFORM SEEMS TO BE CAUSING A POWER DRAIN ON PATHFINDER.!

WE'RE GOING BACK. PREPARE TO BREAK AWAY--.!

I'VE GATHERED RAMA'S HISTORY TAPES...

MUCH LIKE TAPES ON PATHFINDER-- I CAN STUDY THEM IN EXACTING DETAIL...!

PTTTTTTTK

SOON...

CAPTAIN... THE POWER DRAIN--IT'S COMING FROM THAT POD WE PICKED UP OUTSIDE PLUTO --NOT FROM RAMA--.!

BERENSON, GET DOWN THERE. RE-SCAN THAT POD BEFORE IT'S SLUICED. WE MAY HAVE TO VAPORIZE IT IN SPACE.

WITH POWER DOWN 40 PERCENT, WE CAN'T TAKE THE CHANCE.!

AS DANIEL BERENSON RACES TOWARD THE STORAGE HOLD...

RANDY-- THAT SOUND.!

CCRACKK

SOUNDS LIKE THE POD--IT'S HATCHING.!!

WHILE, MANY KILOMETERS AWAY, ORACLE WATCHES TWO EVENTS IT DEEMS IMPORTANT--

SECURE IN TROILUS BEING CHEATED OF HIS PRIZE--

--AND IN THE "OBSOLETE" PATHFINDER'S FATE.

OH MY GOD!!

RANDY... BOB... THE POD... GOT TO WARN--

BERENSON TO BRIDGE-- GENERAL ALERT!!

SECURE THE HOLD. OUR "POWER DRAIN" IS A TROJAN HORSE--DEADLY!

DAMN! WE SCANNED IT AND--

NEVER MIND. LUTZ, TAKE MEAD AND SECURE ALL STATIONS.

SANDRA PETERS, YOU--

ARRGH!

A HUGE ARM-- SMASHING THROUGH!!

BOB-- HELP M--

SKRAK

IN THE STRIDE, CIRCULATORY SEALANT AUTOMATICALLY CLOSES THE RUPTURE AS TROILUS RACES TOWARD THE CRAFT'S WEAPONS. THEN--

HATE TO DO THIS, BUT I CAN'T LET IT CONTAMINATE THE AREA!

WE'LL SWOOP TO CATCH--

APPEARING SUDDENLY, AS IF PLANNED, AIRBORNE INSECT RESISTANCE BLOCKS THE STRIDE'S PATH--

--AND ITS PILOTS SWITCH TO RADIATION TRACKING TO HOME IN ON THE INSECT CARCASS BELOW.

THE STRIDE IS TOO LATE TO RECOVER THE INSECT BEFORE IT IS STOLEN AWAY INTO THE LABYRINTH.

TROILUS CAN ONLY HOPE THE INSECTS ARE RESISTANT ENOUGH TO RADIATION TO TAKE THE CARCASS DEEP BELOW TO PREVENT CONTAMINATING THE AREA... BEFORE THEY DIE.

...dan...

THE ENTIRE WEAPONS SECTION-- DESTROYED! HOW--?

NO...NO...

SANDRA!!

FRUMP

OUR EMERGENCY WELDER--YOU'RE USING IT AS A *WEAPON!*

FZAPP

THE *ESCAPE CAPSULE*... SHORROCK'S BODY SLAUGHTERED AT THE CONTROLS. I MOVED IT...

DAMN HIM! PREPARING *HIS* ESCAPE INSTEAD OF *SECURING*--

NO MATTER. *YOU* DO IT-- *NOW!*

MOMENTS LATER...

IT'S STILL COMING, DAN-- MOVE! I CAN'T HOLD IT OFF WITH THIS FOREVER!

I'M WORKING AS FAST AS I CAN. THESE HAVE BEEN JAMMED DELIBERATELY--

--FORCED WITH INCREDIBLE STRENGTH!

OH NO--A FORCE FIELD! WHAT KIND OF CREATURE--

IT IS THE LAST WORD TO SLIP FROM SANDRA PETERS' LIPS.

PLEASE, GOD, DON'T LET THIS BE HAPPENING!

FOR A MOMENT, DANIEL BERENSON DIES AS WELL--

--HE IS THE ONLY PATHFINDER CREW-MEMBER LEFT--

--AND THE WORLD BELOW MAY NOT BE HIS ANY LONGER--

--AND FOR ALL OF IT HE WANTS TO KNOW WHY.

AFTER WHICH, HE CRIES--

--FOR A VERY LONG TIME.

WHILE, IN THE STRIDE...

TROILUS-- OUT THERE!

WHA--? LOOKS LIKE A SHIP!

CHANGE COURSE TO 173.1, MAGGIE. WE'RE GOING TO INVESTIGATE.

EARTH'S FINEST AIRSHIP SOARS OVER BELOVED AVALONE, ITS CREW UNAWARE OF PATHFINDER'S EMERGENCY CAPSULE AS IT DESCENDS...

ONE OF ITS THRUSTERS FAILS TO FIRE--

--WHICH DOES NOT GO UNNOTICED--

--BY ORACLE, WHICH GIVES A COMMAND TO "RETRIEVE"--

--BUT OTHERWISE KEEPS ITS OWN COUNSEL.

--unnghh--

Next Issue: "CITY OF FOOLS"